

Mussels

Western Pearlshell (*Margaritifera falcata*)

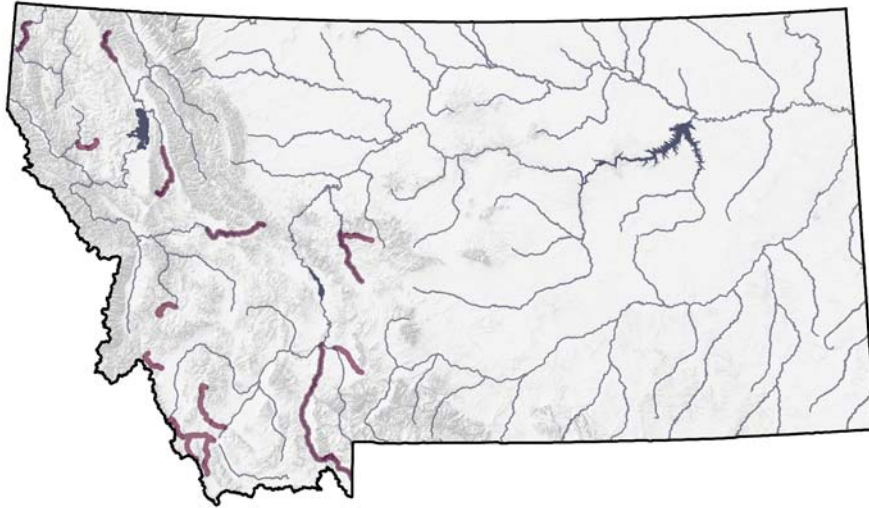


Figure 43. Distribution of the Western Pearlshell Mussel

Range

This is a headwater species occurring very near the Continental Divide in trout streams and rivers west of the divide and in Missouri River headwaters. Outside of Montana this species is reported in Pacific drainages, from southern Alaska to central California. It does not seem to occur anywhere in the central part of the continent.

Habitat

The normal fish hosts in the area are probably the *Oncorhynchus* species, but *Salmo* and *Salvelinus* and even *Rhinichthys* and *Catostomus* are reported to be suitable. The western pearlshell mussel likely crossed the divide with the westslope cutthroat trout, which is the native salmonid of the upper Missouri River drainage. This species occurs in sand, gravel, and even between cobbles and boulders.

Management

Mussels are a regulated species, but a better understanding of mussel distribution throughout the state is needed.

Conservation Concerns & Strategies

Conservation Concerns	Conservation Strategies
Habitat degradation and fragmentation (e.g., dams, stream channelization, diversions, dredging, and dewatering)	Consider preparing a management plan for the western pearlshell mussel or include it into other comprehensive taxonomic management plans
Point and nonpoint source pollution	Enforcement of regulations that address the dumping of pollutants into waterways
Stream deterioration because of high sediment loads	Restoration of stream channels, streambanks , riparian areas to a condition that simulates their natural form and function
	Support land use practices that encourage minimizing sedimentation form runoff (example, stream set backs)
Threats to host fish also jeopardize mussel survival	Restore connectivity of habitat and manage for healthy populations of native fish including cutthroat trout and bull trout
Reduced dissolved oxygen content in water	Work with agencies, organizations and the public to identify point source pollution that reduces dissolved oxygen contents in water
	Encourage forest management practices that maintain healthy canopy cover over streams to stabilize temperature

Management Plan

None

Citations

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